

# SHEER DINO-A

**What do you call a blind dinosaur? A *Doyouthinkesaurus!* Yes, the world is about to go dino crazy once more with the arrival on video - at last - of Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park*. We tried to talk to Tyrannosaurus Rex, and his mate Terry Dactyl, but in the end we settled for this exclusive interview with Michael Crichton, the best-selling author of the novel and screenplay of the most popular movie ever made...**

In his novel, *Jurassic Park*, Michael Crichton comes close - or so it would seem to a careless reader - to reworking the standard science-fiction plot of portraying the havoc that erupts when scientists meddle in things they were not meant to experiment with. However, instead of telling us that there are some things man was not meant to meddle in, *Jurassic Park* tells us there are things we cannot know. The plot of the disaster which engulfs the park is an illustration of the book's theme: that there are limits to our ability to understand and control the world, and that science, whose premise is that we can understand and control everything, is an outdated system that needs to be replaced.

Of course that's not what attracted audiences to cinemas in their millions, and made *Jurassic Park* the most successful film of all time. People went because they wanted to see dinosaurs roaring and rampaging across the big screen in a way that had never been seen before.

As a matter of fact, Crichton originally conceived his dinosaur-cloning story as a screenplay, minus the thematic subtext. "I had become interested in the notion of obtaining dinosaur DNA and cloning a dinosaur in 1983," he recalls of his initial effort. "But the script just didn't work, and I then decided to just wait to see if I could ever figure out how to make it work. It took quite a few years.

"It was originally a very different story," he continues. "It was about the

person who did the cloning, operating alone and in secret. It just wasn't satisfactory. The real conclusion for me was that what you really wanted in a story like this was to have a sort of natural environment in which people and dinosaurs could be together. You wanted

**"I wanted to avoid having dinosaurs in New York City - that's been done so many times before in movies like *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*"**

the thing that never happened in history: people in the forests and swamps at the same time as dinosaurs.

"Once that notion began to dictate how the story would proceed, then everything else fell into place. Because there are certain things that I wanted to avoid, like dinosaurs in New York City - that's been done so many times before in movies like *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*."

Working with his new slant on the story, Crichton opted to write a novel. "I didn't revise the script," he says. "By the time I got around to doing it, there were other considerations. The most important was that it wasn't clear that anyone could ever make this story into a movie, because it was very expensive. So one way to get the story done was to write a book. I knew I could do that." ►



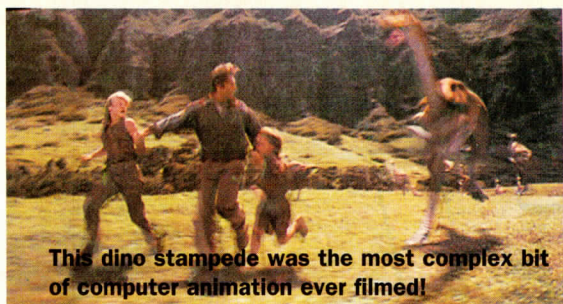


# WELCOME!



"No, you can't keep him!"





This dino stampede was the most complex bit of computer animation ever filmed!



## VISCERAL THINGS

Despite the story's origins as a screenplay, the novel expounds on its thematic material in depth, mostly through the character of Ian Malcolm, a mathematician whose self-title theory "The Malcolm Effect" predicts the failure of the park. Of course, this material had to be condensed or deleted when the story came full circle to being a script again.

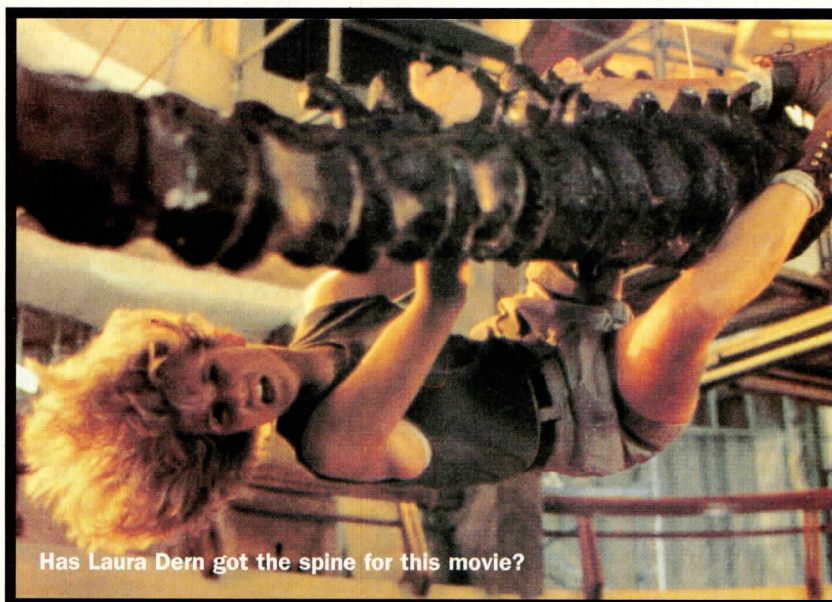
"I feel very strongly that books should be the best books they can be, and you should not worry about what the movie will do," Crichton says of his un-cinematic approach, which makes the novel stand up as a work in its own right rather than a stepping stone to a film deal. "In movies, a little bit of that kind of dialogue goes a long way. A movie like *Jurassic Park* is not the format to have extended discussions on the scientific paradigm. So actually, what is quite appropriate for a book is quite inappropriate for a movie, and on that basis it ought to be cut structurally."

Further describing the adaptation process, Crichton goes on to say that, "The other reality is that it's a fairly long book and the script can only have somewhere between 10 and 20 percent of the content. So what you're really trying to do is make a sort of short story that reproduces the quality of the novel and has all the big scenes retained and has the logical flow that appears in a much longer and more extended argument. That's what determines what stays and what goes."

The author adaptor continues, "A similar issue has to do with what you call 'visceral things.' You can have gory descriptions in a book, because everyone is their own projectionist. I've always found it unwise to do that in a movie, because it throws you out of the movie. As soon as you see guts, you immediately think, 'Where did they get them? How did they do that?' You do not

believe for a moment that that's actually happening. Since it's not to anyone's advantage to throw the audience out of the movie, and since I see it as an insoluble problem to present viscera, the movie wisely doesn't do that.

"I also think the explicitness of the violence serves a different purpose in the book. You don't have certain advantages a movie has, so in a way the violence is a way to say, 'These are real dinosaurs,



Has Laura Dern got the spine for this movie?

and take them seriously, O Reader!' In the movie, if they look wonderful, then you take them seriously. You don't have to see them tearing people open. Your decision to take them seriously is based on other things, so it's not only necessary but unwise, and Steven didn't do it."

## MISSING SCENES

Crichton did the first several drafts of the screenplay, retaining the basics of his own novel in condensed form. "I think everyone's feeling was they liked the book in its overall shape and structure, and they wanted to keep that. So the question was how to get it, since there are some parts - but not a tremendous number of parts - where it's clear that you can just lift it out and the structure remains. It was really a question of paring down and trying to keep things from the original."

Along the way, Crichton was forced to drop several scenes he would have like to have retained, but his previous experience as a screenwriter taught him

to be philosophical about the process. "Scenes went for all kinds of reasons, in the sense that they were difficult to do; they went out on the belief that they were repetitive in some way. But I think that the primary thing that drives

something like this is budget. I mean, you can spend a billion dollars. You have to stop somewhere, and where you stop, people will say, 'Oh, that was my favourite scene, and it's not in.'"

Although authors sometimes adapt their own novels for the screen in order to try to protect their work from tampering filmmakers, this was not Crichton's intention. In fact he did not initially intend to do the adaptation

himself. "I didn't have it in my mind to do the script. But Steven said, 'We really need to pare this thing down into some kind of manageable shape so we know what to build and what not to build, and it has to happen fast.'"

"I said, 'I do have the advantage of having tried many versions of this, so I know what works. I'll whack it down. Then when you want to do your character polishes, get somebody else.' I really wasn't able to stay with the project for three years; I had other things to do. I really didn't want to do the script; I had a lot of confidence in Spielberg.

"There's advantages and disadvantages to having the

original writer. In some ways it's easier, because you're more familiar with the story; in some ways it's harder, because you're more familiar with the material. I think people have the idea that it's the love of all your words. I don't have any sense of that at all. What's difficult for me is that in doing a story like this, you do several drafts which change the story dramatically, one to the other - at least that was what happened with this book. So you've rethought it several times already; now you have to rethink it again for a movie. And it's just hard to rethink it too many times. It's hard to take the same elements, toss them up in the air, and rearrange them again and again."

At least Crichton can now be confident that those elements were arranged in the right order. "It's a pretty amazing movie, isn't it?" he says with commendable understatement. "It has stuff in it that people are totally floored by, they just can't believe what they see. It's always nice to be associated with something so incredibly popular."

Especially when, like him, you also get a percentage of the profits!





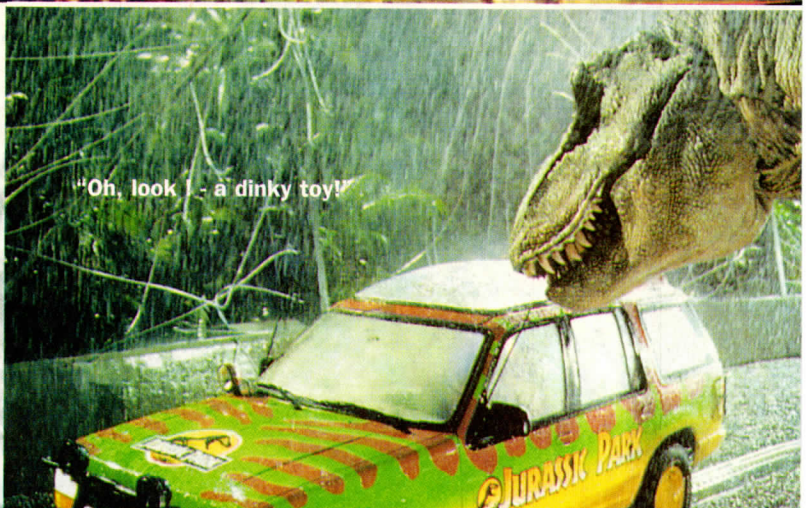
Sam Neill chose the wrong place for a picnic!



"It's going to cost us a fortune to feed!"



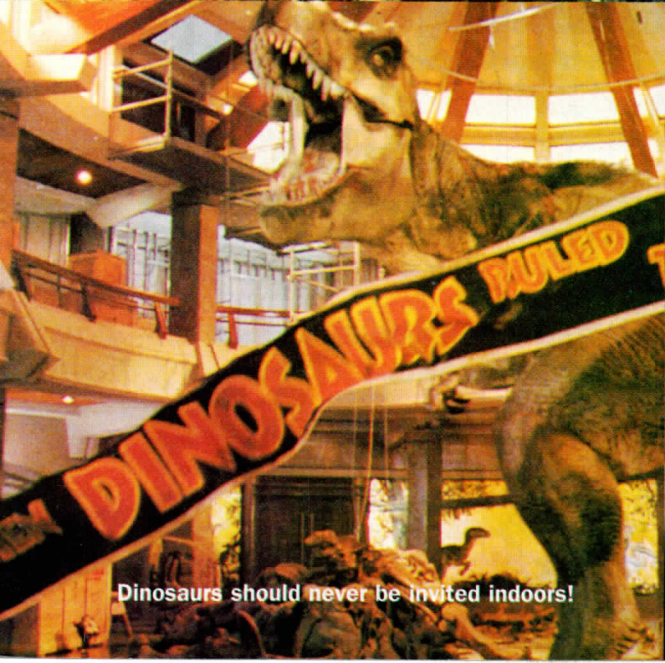
"Boo!"



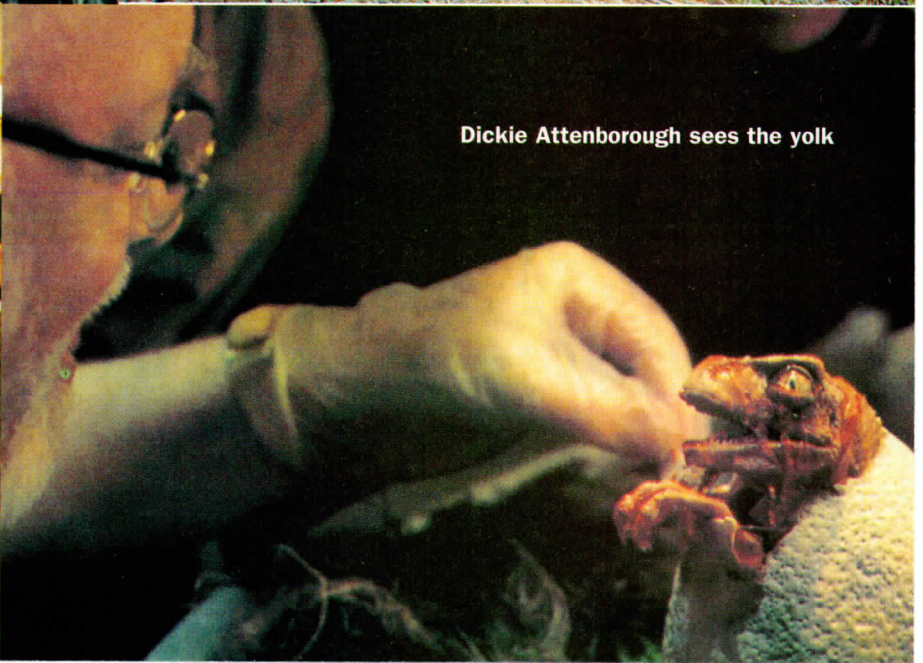
"Oh, look! - a dinky toy!"



Spielberg and producer Kathleen Kennedy



Dinosaurs should never be invited indoors!



Dickie Attenborough sees the yolk